

**Treasure Chest
Environmental Print and the Letter Wall
Frequently Asked Questions About the Letter Wall****What is a Letter Wall?**

The Letter Wall is a visual display of the alphabet with a key word picture for each letter. It is used as an interactive tool to expose young children to a variety of concepts throughout the year. All words on the Letter Wall should be accompanied by a picture.

Letter Walls help emergent readers and writers become aware of:

- Letter forms
- Letter names
- Basic letter-sound correspondences
- The idea that words can be written down
- The concept of “words”
- Beginning letters of familiar words

Where do I put the Letter Wall?

Find a space large enough for the alphabet (two lines are acceptable). Ideally this space would be located in or near the circle time area. This space should be accessible to children and at their eye level.

Options:

If there is a lack of wall space, other options include:

- Portable boards, such as science project boards, sewing/cutting boards, etc.
- The backs of shelving units in your classroom
- The space below chalk boards

How do I set up the Letter Wall?

- Use small cards which include the upper- and lowercase letter and key word icon.
- Arrange these in sequential order. If two rows are used, make sure to put A through M on the top row, and N through Z on the bottom row. Also, leave room for four to five word cards to fit under each letter card.
- If possible, use Velcro strips under each letter to allow words to be easily added and removed.

How do I introduce the Letter Wall to the children?

One of the levels of accomplishment one can expect of a three- or four-year-old is that the child knows that alphabet letters are a special category of visual graphics that can be individually named (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

- Discuss the alphabet with children. Ask them what they know about the alphabet. Help children begin to understand that the letters in the alphabet are the letters we use to read and write.
- During the first couple of weeks, read some simple ABC books, such as *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*, *Alphabet Under Construction*, and *Eating the Alphabet*. Also, sing a variety of alphabet songs and use a pointer to point out the letters.

Play games such as:

- Having children point out the letters they know.
- Giving children a letter and having them match it to the letters on the Letter Wall.
- Using a variety of pointers to have children point to letters on the wall.

What are the first words that I should put on the Letter Wall?

The first words that go on the Letter Wall should be the children's names. One way to make this more meaningful to children is to read an alphabet name book, such as *From Anne to Zach*, *A My Name Is Alice*, and *Alphabears*.

Next, tell the children that you are going to make your own class alphabet book together. Put one letter on each page of the book. Add the children's names and pictures under each corresponding letter. Leave the page blank if no one in the class has a name that begins with that letter. Read the book to the class.

Next, make a name card for each child. This should have the first name only with their photo. (Symbols can be used, as in Angel Nihiser's classroom, if photos are unavailable.) Names should be written with the first letter uppercase and the rest lowercase.

Play a game. Call out the letters in sequential order. If someone has a name that begins with that letter, they put their name card under the letter. Make this fun and exciting! This could happen in one session or on several occasions over the course of the week.

What other words do I put on the Letter Wall?

Words chosen for the Letter Wall should be meaningful to the children.

Words could be chosen from:

- Read alouds

- Theme concepts
- Songs, rhymes, poems, etc.

Words could also include:

- Storybook characters
- Class pets
- Words children are interested in

Remember to include both “everyday” and “rare” words on the Letters Wall. Everyday words are common nouns that most children are familiar with, such as: *cat, moon, hand, plate*, etc. Rare words are words that are new to children, such as *blueprint, carpenter, bulldozer*, etc. (These are examples of rare words you might encounter in a construction theme.)

Note: Words that you put on the Letter Wall must be illustrated.

- The picture provides support and meaning for the child.
- High-frequency words should not be included unless they can be illustrated.

One method for introducing high-frequency words is to use “star words.” Purchase glow-in-the-dark stars and write high-frequency words (e.g., *is, and, the*, etc.) on them. Children will begin to notice these words as they frequently occur in books, poems, etc.

What should I consider when making word cards?

- Use lowercase letters on word cards (except for the first letter of proper nouns).
- The size print that you should use depends on the space you have available. If your Letter Wall space is large, you may want to use a piece of a sentence strip. If the space is small, you may want a part of a sentence strip cut lengthwise.
- Using consistent sized print will help your children as they develop word concepts and print awareness.
- The word should be written first and then followed by a picture.
- Pictures may be drawn, taken from magazines, or downloaded from the Internet.

How long should words remain on the Letter Wall?

- Keep names up all year.
- Give children plenty of time to interact with words before taking them down.
- If themes last for an extended time (three to four weeks), words may be changed with the theme.
- Avoid letting the Letter Wall get cluttered or become unattractive.

What do I do with words I take down from the Letter Wall?

- Put the words into a book. Words may be used to make a theme book ("Our Farm Book"), a letter book ("Our M Book"), or an alphabet book ("Our A-Z Book").
- Books may be placed in the Library center, the Writing center, etc.
- Words may be placed in a word file in the Writing center.
- Words may be used to make a game.

When do I use the Letter Wall?

The Letter Wall should be used daily. You can use your Letter Wall in large group, small group, circle time, or centers.

Remember: If children are not interacting and involved with the Letter Wall, it becomes a decoration. Children will only learn from the Letter Wall if it is meaningful to them. Children's interest will be sparked when new games and activities are introduced. Make games and activities with the Letter Wall bold, fun, playful, and interactive.

What materials will enhance Letter Wall activities?

Place a basket or container by the Letter Wall, including some of the following items:

- Pointers
- "Fun" glasses
- Wikki sticks
- Magnifying glasses
- Removable book cover squares
- Clip boards with paper and pencils
- Magic slate
- Post-It® Notes

This will encourage children to use the Letter Wall independently during centers. Remember to change items every one to two weeks to spark children's interest.